

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 2, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: A Plans and Operations Committee of the
National Security Council

As you know, there has been considerable discussion in recent months of the need for strengthening interdepartmental planning and coordination on major national security issues. We made a major step forward at the time of the October crisis when you established a working senior committee of advisers, first by your de facto choice of individuals for the work of the first week, and then by formally establishing the Executive Committee of the NSC on October 22. The Executive Committee, with you and the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense on hand, is a good instrument for major interdepartmental decision. It is not so good for lesser matters of coordination, and it has not proved effective at all, except during the extraordinary week of October 16-22, in the process of forward planning.

I have talked at some length with the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, Averell Harriman, and others, in an effort to find a new pattern which would help in both planning and operations. I have come out with the following guidelines:

1. One new committee should be responsible for planning and operations at the level short of your own controlling judgment. We have done well in this Administration not to let planning get separated from the responsibility for action, and vice versa. We should not abandon this principle now.
2. The committee should be established at a sufficiently senior level so that it is not merely a staff exercise. In my judgment, this means that with four exceptions its membership should be parallel to that of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. It should include such men as the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, Ed Murrow, John McCone, and probably Max Taylor. The people it should not include, in my judgment, are the President and Vice President, and the two Cabinet officers with a final responsibility for policy advice to you, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

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By MCO NARS, Date 4/26/76

Neither of these two Cabinet officers can speak in committee without engaging the whole weight of a great advisory department, and both of them have preferred not to be pinned to any procedure in which their direct responsibilities to you might somehow be absorbed in a committee process.

3. The Plans and Operations Committee should be chaired from the White House, presumably by me, but it should rely mainly upon State, Defense, and CIA for staff work. For this reason, it is of the greatest importance that the State representative be a man with a broad and continuous operational responsibility, but also with time and energy for this particular assignment. I think it clear that the right man, on these grounds, is Averell Harriman, using the Policy Planning Council for plans and the several bureaus for operational problems. Of course, nothing should prevent the presence at relevant sessions of any officer of the State Department (on a number of problems George Ball would probably wish to come and on some the Secretary might want to break his own rule), but it is critical to the success of such a committee that there be a single senior member of the State Department to whom I can turn for daily business, and on this basis, Averell is the logical man in the logical job.

4. The committee should meet weekly, and it should have as little continuing infrastructure as possible. Except for State, Defense, and CIA -- its members should attend as individuals and not as representatives of agencies. If a man cannot come, in other words, no one automatically comes in his place -- except in the case of State, Defense, and CIA, where the departments simply have to be included.

In sum, what I recommend is that you establish a Plans and Operations Committee on this general basis. My recommendation is that its initial composition should be as follows:

The Political Under Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and the Director, for State, Defense, and CIA, respectively; the following as members by your personal appointment: Douglas Dillon, Robert Kennedy, Edward Murrow, Dave Bell, Maxwell Taylor (subject to his agreement -- he is terribly stretched), Theodore Sorensen, and Llewellyn Thompson. The chairman of this committee should be myself, and its administrative support should be provided by Mr. Bromley Smith.

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5. The Plans and Operations Committee should not occupy itself with business better handled through other channels. In particular it should not try to get on the cables or to replace the manifold arrangements through which your own executive business is now conducted. Still less should it be concerned with matters of daily Departmental operation. It should, instead, be alert to planning problems that are a little less ripe than today's required decisions: like Cuba a year from now -- or China in 1965. It should serve as a ready medium for review of ongoing programs with strongly interdepartmental aspects: I think of overseas base planning, of counter-insurgency support, and of information policy as examples. It should be used for the occasional discursive review of drastic alternatives to existing policy, and its members should be encouraged to table unorthodox ideas for such review. It would be a logical place for occasional review of Intelligence estimates in progress, from the point of view of their relevance to Plans and Operations.

6. If you approve of this general proposal, I shall work out a formal memorandum for your signature after checking again with those most closely concerned.

McG. B.

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